

Rebellion, - A SHADO-MarsBase story

Lieve Peten

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Written in honour of the 5th anniversary of Fab-Ufo.

"Five years... I've given five years of sweat and sacrifice to get Fab-Ufo running the way I want it - I'm not letting some old punk take it away from me!"

Col. Richard Wright looked up from his desk and stared at Col. Marc Martin, who was visibly upset. "What's wrong, Marc?"

Marc threw an angry glance at Richard. "They are closing us down! The list. They say Fab-Ufo is distracting us from the job."

Richard frowned. "Surely - I mean, Commander Peten has always been in favour - and she's a member. She wouldn't..."

His voice trailed off. Marc might be upset, but he wouldn't call Lieve - Cmdr. Peten - a punk. He must mean either Straker or Henderson.

Marc wheeled around and headed for the drinks dispenser. He hesitated momentarily, then pushed the button labelled 'Cognac' twice. He returned with the glass in his hand and sat down sideways on Richard's desk.

"Communication from General Henderson," he mumbled, then emptied the glass in one go.

Richard frowned - this was the first time he had ever seen Marc drink. He must think the situation hopeless. But it wasn't, surely!

Marc put the glass down with a bang, then asked. "Where are Lieve and Ed?"

"Checking out that new private enterprise, you know, the Boeing subsidiary."

Marc barked a grim laugh. "First they launch rockets from the sea, now from Mars. What next?"

"Space?" Richard hazarded, but Marc wasn't listening.

Richard hesitated, then suggested hopefully. "Lieve won't let them shut us down. She'll talk General Straker around. He in turn will handle that lot at Astrophysical."

Marc shook his head. "Ed spends too much time here, he must be losing his hold on them. I said to Henderson that Straker would most likely support us and Henderson said they wouldn't listen to him."

Richard thought for a moment. "It's most likely the Peace With The Aliens movement. They have friends in high places."

Marc grimaced. "And that while people don't even know that aliens exist. How ridiculous is that?"

"Do we know who is behind it? Didn't Commander Peten mention a report on that group?"

"She did. Call her and ask!"

"No need," Richard said, turned to the console, and started typing. "I can get into her files."

Marc raised his eyebrows. "Does she know?"

Richard smiled. "She caught me at it the other day. She merely asked to make sure nobody else could break in."

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"That's unconstitutional!" Major Yuchtar exclaimed fiercely. "What about freedom of speech?"

Lt. Bernard Farkin shook his head. "We're not on Earth - nor in the States. We're not even regular military personnel. They are making the rules for MarsBase personnel as they go along."

Cmdr. Peten sighed. "Ed talked to a few of the Commission members. The French delegate said he would support us, but none of the others would."

"Whose idea was it to close us down?" Yuchtar asked.

"Some woman called Tracy Martin," Marc said bitterly. "She doesn't even know MarsBase exists! All this 'It distracts us from the job' Henderson came up with is just a smoke screen. They plan to close down other Internet mailing lists too, all lists about TV shows which put aliens in a bad light. They are using Fab-Ufo as a test-case."

"Tracy Martin?" Yuchtar said questioningly.

"No relation of mine, I assure you! She's the driving force behind the Peace With The Aliens movement."

"Oh them!" Yuchtar said disparagingly, then sighed. "But how are we going to turn things around?"

Richard looked around the small group which was present at the meeting - they were all people who had been on MarsBase more or less from the start - all people they could trust.

He noticed Lieve nodding at him and said softly. "I have a suggestion."

They all looked at him and he knew he had to go on now. In spite of his misgivings... If someone in this group talked, he would be in trouble, he knew it. Was it worth the risk? He glanced at Lieve, noticed she was about to speak, and realised he couldn't let her voice the idea. She could, if this turned out all wrong, do something to help him, she knew so many people - but she, as Commanding Officer of MarsBase, would be dealt with more severely than one of her officers. So he said quickly. "We could go on strike."

The many gasps and surprised faces told him nobody had thought of this. Did that mean it was a bad idea?

He went on hesitantly. "I could send an anonymous, untraceable message to the Astrophysical Commission announcing the strike and that it won't end until they change their minds about closing Fab-Ufo down. I can send it in such a way that it will appear on our screens too. 95 percent of MarsBase personnel is on Fab-Ufo, so they will more than likely support us. We all deny sending the message, but we all stand by it and prompt the others to do the same."

Marc nodded slowly. "It could work. But what if they do trace the sender? What if they don't - and get the wrong person? They'll want a scapegoat, someone to pin it on."

Lieve stood up and said grimly. "If that happens, every single person present at this meeting will come forward and claim to be the sender. And that's an order! There are 25 of us - they can't court-martial all of us, there would be no officers left to run the show."

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Richard looked around their little group - all the MarsBase officers. Most seemed both triumphant and subdued. Triumphant because their scheme had worked - Fab-Ufo was still alive and kicking, the powers-that-be down on earth had succumbed to the blackmail. Subdued because there was a distinct possibility that they would all be sanctioned. Or one could be singled out to take the blame. Unless Henderson had found out? Each and every one of them

had said the hour-long interrogation had gone well, that they hadn't spilled the beans. But one of them could have cracked and not told the group.

Lieve, the last to be questioned by Henderson and his crowd, came in, smiling broadly. "Isn't it fun to see Henderson livid?"

Richard asked anxiously. "Does that mean we're in the clear?"

"I should say so - if he had found out who was behind it he would have been in a better mood."

Her words were not yet cold when Henderson came in, followed by General Straker and the two unnamed blank-faced officers who had been present at the questioning. Henderson looked around the group of MarsBase officers in an amused manner, which worried Richard. There was no more sign of his earlier anger - did this mean the interrogation had had the desired effect after all?

Henderson pulled his face in a wolfish grimace and said ironically. "I'm sure you guys think you got away with it. What you seem to have forgotten is that science advances all the time." He wheeled around and signalled one of his men, who took a small box out of his pocket and explained confidently. "This instrument tells us who lies and who doesn't. It told us who was guilty."

Richard could feel a few fleeting glances directed at him and wondered if this was a ploy, if this small machine was a bluff destined to trick the others into looking at the person who originated the idea, hence indicating the guilty party.

"A new type of lie detector - how interesting," Lieve said enthusiastically. "How does it work? Can we have one of those for MarsBase?"

The guy hesitated, then admitted. "It's still in an experimental state."

"But the results must be 100 percent accurate, if you're going to accuse one of us of organising the strike - of sending that message."

The irony in her voice was unmistakable and seemed to annoy Henderson, wiping the awry grin off his face.

Henderson turned towards Marc and barked. "We know it was you who was responsible for the strike, Colonel. No use denying it."

Marc smiled amiably. "I'm not denying anything."

"You're admitting it?" Henderson's mouth fell open in surprise, which made him look like a sheep.

"Not that either."

Lieve stood up and moved up close to Henderson, looking him in the eyes. "Is that what that lie detector told you? That Marc was responsible?"

"That's right," Henderson said in a clipped voice, taking a step back as if he wasn't too comfortable at having her so close to him.

"All by himself? Nobody else?"

"That's right."

Lieve smiled brightly and said in a condescending manner. "In that case, Sir, there is no need to give us one of these instruments. I prefer results to be more accurate than a mere four percent."

Henderson looked puzzled and Lieve went on. "According to my information, General, all senior officers on MarsBase participated."

"Who sent the message?"

"That's irrelevant. Sir."

Henderson shook his head, turned towards his two cronies and said, "Take Colonel Martin into custody."

As the two men went up to the still smiling Marc, Richard stood up and said bravely. "Excuse me, Sir - not Colonel Martin but me sent that message."

Henderson looked from Richard to Marc, hesitated, then barked. "Of course, I should have guessed - the computer expert! Guys, take Colonel Wright into custody!"

The two men advanced towards Richard, but the moment one took handcuffs out of his pocket, Lt. Farkin stood up and said pleasantly. "Actually, it wasn't Richard, but me! Does that make me a computer expert too?"

The baffled Henderson stared at Bernard, and as one by one the other officers stood up and claimed to have been the culprit, his face got redder and redder until Richard thought he would explode.

Suddenly Henderson turned towards Lieve and said in a dangerous-sounding voice. "Were you in on it, Commander?"

Richard cast a worried look in Lieve's direction. Would she lie? Would she tell Henderson it was all four of them - she herself, Straker, Marc and Richard - who had come up with the idea while talking things over? Richard wasn't even sure any more who had first voiced the thought.

Before Lieve could reply, Straker stood up and said coolly. "Oh come on, Henderson, you have plenty of culprits already. Pick one, or leave it be."

Henderson wheeled around at hearing Straker's voice and muttered, "You too huh. I should have guessed," after which he stalked towards the exit, saying to nobody in particular. "Prepare the shuttle, I'm leaving."

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Straker looked at the very quiet Henderson, not quite sure what the outcome of their little stunt would be. Maybe, in the end, this strike hadn't been such a good idea. After all, why would a mailing list be so important? Henderson could make life very difficult for them, if he was angry still.

Henderson looked out of one of the port holes and said. "Right, I think they are about ready to leave." He looked around as if to check nobody was listening and asked in a conspiratorial voice, "Who sent that message, Straker? Just for my own information?"

"I honestly don't know."

It was true - after voicing the idea he had kept out of it. He didn't want to have to lie to Henderson more than necessary, after all, in spite of their continuous strife, Henderson had at one time been a friend. Should he tell Henderson that the sender of the message wasn't the person who had originated the idea? If he did, Henderson would assume he, Straker, was taking the blame for someone else. That's how the guy's mind worked.

Henderson, who had been observing Straker closely, sighed. "Your little Commander in charge does though. Right?"

"Shall I ask her, Henderson?" he suggested, unconcerned.

"Never mind." Henderson shrugged as he picked up his briefcase. "I didn't exactly expect results. I know what the MarsBase people are like."

Straker smiled. "They have one thing in common, General - their bloodymindedness. It built MarsBase and it gets them results much higher than either MoonBase or SHADO HQ."

Henderson shook his head. "Let me give you a piece of advice, Ed. Leave MarsBase to its own devices and return to Earth. I'm retiring soon, and you're next in line for my job."

Straker thought for a while, then said. "Forget it. They are the family I was never allowed to have. This is my home now."